

# At the YMCA kids can Reach for the Rainbow

In September of 2008, following a wonderful and successful summer for the YMCA of Oakville summer camps, Mr. David Neal of Reach for the Rainbow wrote the following about this dedicated agency's partnership with the Oakville Y.

Reach for the Rainbow (RFTR) develops integrated opportunities that enrich the lives of children and young adults with disabilities, their families and the communities to which they belong.

The agency is committed to promoting an environment where children and young

adults with disabilities can mature with their peers; one which encourages awareness and compassion and allows persons with disabilities to discover their full potential.

RFTR is proud of its long-standing partnership with the YMCA of Oakville Day Camps, since 1994.

Last summer 30 children and youths, and six young adults, acting as volunteers, were fully integrated into the YMCA Adventure and Bronte Creek camps, involving 12 YMCA co-ordinators and counsellors.

This staff investment was



## POSTCARDS FROM THE Y

more than \$28,000.

The summer began with a large contingent of YMCA of Oakville summer staff attending the 19th annual Reach for the Rainbow Conference held at Humber College and sponsored by the SickKids

Foundation of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

It is among the largest children's camp conferences in Canada.

Alex Lelievre from the YMCA of Oakville was one of five camp staff members recognized for exceptional efforts in 2007 and received a \$500 student scholarship, presented by Reach for the Rainbow.

During pre-camp week, RFTR trained all YMCA of Oakville Day Camp staff, emphasizing the importance of camp-wide commitment to integration.

Several times weekly,

RFTR staff visited the two camps to assist with successful integration, while providing loan cupboard supplies, including all-terrain Terra Treks and three-wheeled joggers, which help to level the playing field for participants with physical disabilities.

There is no charge to families or the YMCA for the RFTR service.

It has been years since a child or adult at the YMCA of Oakville through Reach for the Rainbow, has not completed their camp term, an accomplishment for which we can all be justifiably proud.

Reach for the Rainbow programs serve a wide range of disabilities.

Participants are referred to a camp by Reach for the Rainbow and are accepted, without selection according to skills or levels.

Consequently families feel well supported and confident about their child's camping experience.

This is what parents had to say about the staff and programs at the YMCA of Oakville this summer:

"A highly motivated staff; very positive attitude at camp."

"Camp staff was wonderful and were willing to work together and make my son's day more successful."

"Everyone was helpful and cheerful. I appreciated that they remembered my child from previous years, he loved that!"

"The volunteering experience was the most rewarding, because my son felt useful."

"Benefits include building relationships, self confidence, independence and having fun."

"My daughter enjoyed being with the other kids and the opportunity to be in the community."

Reach for the Rainbow partnership activities do not end there, as we look forward to another year of joining in with YMCA Aquatics, March Break and other programs.

An Oakville parent has written about this experience at the YMCA for her family:

"When you're waitlisted for every imaginable service and on your own in so many ways with a child with a disability, it's very easy to get cynical about what the system says and does about living with disabilities.

"Reach for the Rainbow, you have exceeded my expectations tremendously, and we so appreciate the important work you're doing. Swim lessons might not seem like a big deal to some, but they are huge to my son and me at this stage. Julian is gaining confidence in the water and is learning a critically-important life and safety skill. Plus, he is having a blast and really looks forward to his weekly swim lesson."

*Regards,*

*David Neal*

*Director of Programs*

*Reach for the*

*Rainbow*

The YMCA of Oakville is a charitable association open to all, dedicated to providing life-long opportunities for health enhancement and personal growth.

— Submitted by the YMCA of Oakville

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## Presents for pets

Animal Aid Foundation presents its 2008 annual Christmas Gifts For Pets Fundraiser for three days this weekend.

On Friday, Dec. 12, Saturday, Dec. 13 and Sunday, Dec. 14, during mall hours, you'll find the sale at the Community Booth at Oakville Place, lower level behind the escalators.

Foundation volunteers will be selling a variety of their best selling toys like catnip cigars, catnip fortune

cookies and twirly cat teaser toys as well as new designs for this year which include catnip bean bag and crinkle toys and fleece teaser toys. Dog gifts include all natural Doggie Biscotti, Italian Cheese Twists and Puppy Stars as well as dog coats, dog bone squeak toys.

Proceeds fund veterinary medical care programs of local animal charities. Visit [www.animalaidfoundation.ca](http://www.animalaidfoundation.ca) for more information.